CHARITY AND SHABBAT: THE REMEDY FOR THE SIN OF THE GOLDEN CALF

(by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto

Moses assembled all the congregation of the Children of Israel and said to them, “These are the things that the L-RD commanded, to do them: On six days, work may be done, but the seventh day shall be holy for you, a day of complete rest for the L-RD; whoever does work on it shall be put to death. You shall not kindle fire in any of your dwellings on the Sabbath day” (Ex 35:1-3).

For what reason did Moses, after having summoned all the assembly of the Children of Israel, speak to them first of the mitzvot of Shabbat, rather than the other commandments? As we have seen, he spoke to them about this several times before. Since G-d first commanded them to construct the Tabernacle, why does Moses mention the laws of Shabbat before those concerning the construction of the Tabernacle?

The reason for this was because the sin of the golden calf affected the oneness of the Holy One, blessed be He. In proclaiming, “Here are your gods, O Israel,” the Children of Israel demonstrated that they believed in several divinities, even renouncing the entire Torah. To this effect, commenting on the verse that states, “if you err and do not perform all of these commandments” (Num 15:22), the Talmud explains that the person who renounces idolatry recognizes the entire Torah, and the person who recognizes idolatry acts as if he renounces the entire Torah.

Moses summoned the entire assembly of the Children of Israel in order to shelter them under the wings of the Divine Presence and to make them rediscover the faith that they had lost because of the sin of the golden calf. He immediately prescribed them to observe Shabbat, a day that had been blessed by G-d, as it is written, “G-d blessed the seventh day and sanctified it” (Gen 2:3), the observance of which even constitutes the foundation of our faith. For, as we have seen, the one who strictly observes Shabbat atones for his sins, even if he worshiped idols (as with the generation of Enoch).

Shabbat is equal to all the other mitzvot (Yerushalmi Berachot 1:5), and its observance corrects the sin of Avodah Zarah (idolatry; but literally “strange service”), for all service is forbidden on Shabbat.

Moses made the Children of Israel understand that the construction of the Tabernacle and the Sanctuary would spiritually elevate them, transform them into a miniature sanctuary, and imbue them with the Shechinah. He explained to them that the offering (offering) that they had made would rectify their renouncing of the Torah (not to be pronounced) that rectifies the sin of the Brit. Because of the one whose numerical value, 16, is thus equal to the Name of G-d, the Brit (whose numerical value, 16, is thus equal to the Name of G-d, with the Kollel), one enters into the category of kedusha (the holy assembly) and we rectify the Covenant.

Finally, the sin of the golden calf creates a stain on the holy Covenant, namely sexual perversion (cf. Tanhuma Ki Tisa 20 on Exodus 35:6). As we know, the one who strictly observes the Brit is included in G-d’s holy assembly. The three first letters of the verse that states, “He devoted wealth, but will disgorge it” (Job 20:15) form the Holy Name ChaBO (not to be pronounced) that rectifies the sin of the Brit. Because of the one and the one of ir hakadosh (the holy assembly) and we rectify the Covenant.

Moses explained to the Children of Israel that one can, thought the observance of Shabbat and giving charity, repair the sign of the Covenant, for Shabbat also carries the name “Brit”, as it is written, “The Children of Israel shall observe the Sabbath, to make the Sabbath an eternal Brit [covenant] for their generations” (Ex 31:16). Shabbat and charity are equal to all the mitzvot (Bava Kama 9a), and it is the same with the Covenant, as our Sages teach (Nedarim 32a). In regards to this, we can see the same lesson in the following note written by the Admor of Ger on the tractate of Nedarim: “All the Divine precepts [kol mitzvot Hashem] have the same numerical value as Brit (612).”

The essential is to fear G-d. In this way, one will look to continually correct oneself, to acquire virtues, and to assemble (vayakheil) every good trait.
IN MEMORY OF THE TZADIKIM

REb YITZCHAK GVIRZMAN

Reb Yitzchak Gvirzman, fondly known as “Reb Itzikel”, came into the world on Tevet 12, 5642 (1882) in a tiny village near Gerlitz. He was the son of Rabbi Naftali Elimelech Gvirzman and his wife, Rebbetzina Hannah Brendel. On his father’s side he descended from an impressive line of rabbis. They tell that his grandfather, Rabbi Avraham Gvirzman of Gerlitz, was a Tsaddik Nitzar (a hidden Tsaddik). Even with his most insignificant remarks (for example, when he was bringing cheer to young newlyweds), a careful observer could notice that by his words he implied something much more, and in this way he went about his Divine service. Rabbi Chaim of Tsanz said of his student, Rabbi Avraham Gvirzman, that he didn’t know what it meant to sin, and that he was as innocent as a one-year-old child.

The day of his Brit Milah, his father gave him the name Yitzchak in memory of the Tsaddik of Lublin. His uncle, the Shinover Rebbe, added to him the name of Moshe (in memory of Moshe Rabbeinu, who risked being drowned in the Nile) because his mother had difficulty during labor, and only the prayers of the Tsaddik of Shion saved him. The child thereby received the name of Moshe Yitzchak.

Still very young, he distinguished himself by his exceptional behavior and his kaddisha. They tell that Rav Avraham Chaim Horovitz, who noticed the child when he was 8 years old, asked, “Who is this child? The Shechinah illuminates his face!”

A little afterwards, his family left Gerlitz to go live in Shion. The child lived almost constantly at the residence of his uncle, the Shinover Rebbe. One day, as he was playing in the Beit Midrash (as young children do), he went to hide under the Tallit of his uncle. This happened during the Minhcha service before Shabbat, and the Shinover Rebbe began the repetition of the Amidah. When the child heard the voice of the Rebbe trembling and seeming to shoot out flames, he was overcome with such fright that he ran away and didn’t dare approach his uncle for days.

In the year 5654 (1894), at the age of 12, his uncle sent him to study in Tama with Rabbi Moshe Apter. On the 12th of Tevet 1895, the child celebrated his Bar Mizvah. However his Tefillin weren’t quite ready, and he put on those of his uncle. Years later, Reb Itzikel recounted just how much he was moved by this, and affirmed that he would never again have the courage to thoughtlessly put on the Tefillin of the Rebbe. On that same day he was engaged to Rachel, the daughter of Rav Issachar Dov Hacohen Glanz from the city of Shion, who himself descended from an illustrious family of Rabbanim. On the 8th of Tevet 5659 (1899), the Shinover Rebbe left this world. Reb Itzikel was then 17 years old, and he spoke of his uncle until his dying day.

On Rosh Chodesh Nissan 1899, a few months after the passing of his uncle, the marriage of Reb Itzikel and Rachel his betrothed was celebrated. During that period of time, he didn’t stop elevating himself in purity and holiness, fasting several days in a row and studying Torah day and night.

On the 9th of Av 5674 (1914), the WWI broke out. Cities in Poland and Galicia were turned into battlefields. Russian soldiers chased the Austrian army before them, attacking Jews everywhere as they went. The Cossacks were renown for their cruelty. The city of Shion suffered terribly from the invasion and was almost completely destroyed.

One day, while Reb Itzikel was reciting the Amidah in his basement (which had a door granting access to the street), his daughter Bilah came down to see him. Suddenly she saw a Cossack yelling and demanding something from her father, who then calmly pursued his prayers. The Cossack, engaged with anger, prepared to stab the Rebbie from behind. She let out such a scream that the Cossack himself got scared and bolted as fast as he could to save himself. During this period, Reb Itzikel decided to leave Shion and settle in Pshevorsk. There he began to keep an open house during Shabbat and holidays. The Chassidim flocked to him.
Moses assembled all the congregation of the Children of Israel and said to them, “These are the things that the L-RD commanded, to do them: On six days, work may be done, but the seventh shall be holy for you, a day of complete rest for the L-RD” (Ex 35:1-2).

The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moses: Gather a great assembly and explain to them the Torah in public, and the laws of Shabbat on Shabbat.

One concludes from this that Moses instituted the custom of giving lessons at the time of the subject: The Halachot of Passover on Passover, those of Shavuot on Shavuot, etc. On a given holiday, the laws of that same holiday were elucidated.

Why did the Biblical text put so much emphasis on Shabbat and the holidays? Be it to praise them, or to protest that we don’t observe them sufficiently, it is a question pertaining to these more than any other mitzvot. With regards to what else do we speak of remembrance and observance as we do for Shabbat? Not only that, but the desecration of holy days is aggressively condemned, as for example in the following verse: “My soul detests your New Moons and your appointed times; they have become a burden upon Me” (Isa 1:14).

The Maggid of Dubno explains this to us with a parable.

A man left his family en route to a distant country. When he finally arrived, he waited impatiently for news about his hometown, yet nobody from there ever passed by. One day a beggar showed up and the man immediately recognized him as being from his city. He was overjoyed at his arrival and wanted to hear all the news that he could possibly relay to him. The poor man, however, responded, “Why are you delaying me? I came here for my livelihood, so don’t make me lose any precious time.”

“How much do you think that you’ll be able to collect here?” the man asked.

“Two or three gold pieces,” replied the beggar.

“Here are three gold pieces. Stay here with me!”

He therefore stayed at the man’s home and began to recount everything that had happened to the man’s family. The beggar had hardly begun to speak, however, when drowsiness took a hold of him.

“Since I’ve found here a place where I can rest,” the beggar told himself, “I’ll ask the man of the house to give me a bed to sleep a little!”

His host, however, became angry. “If I relieved you from all your work today, it was only for me – so that you could inform me of how my family was doing! Why, for goodness’ sake, would you go to bed now?”

The Holy One, blessed be He, gave man a privileged soul, a soul whose origin was from under the Throne of Glory, and that in man finds itself far from its natural environment. Every day of the week, even though the Holy One, blessed be He, yearns to hear good news on its part, man is occupied with his business. This is why He gave us Shabbat; it is in order that He may rejoice with us. On Friday, we receive our sustenance for two days in order that Shabbat finds us free of all our worries and ready to rejoice in G-d’s closeness and love.

“For six days you will work”: You may occupy yourself with everything that concerns your body, but the seventh day is a rest in honor of Hashem your G-d. That day should be devoted solely to Hashem, Who granted us this rest in order to rejoice with us, not to see us lounging around in bed or giving ourselves over to other personal activities. It is this that is a “day of complete rest for the L-RD.”